

VZCZCXRO7854
PP RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHLH RUEHPW RUEHROV
DE RUEHKU #4579/01 3401403
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 061403Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7792
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 004579

SIPDIS

NOFORN
SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/ARP AND INR/I

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/06/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KISL](#) [KWMN](#) [KU](#) [ISLAMISTS](#)
SUBJECT: (C) C-NE6-01698: KUWAITI ISLAMISTS' INITIATIVES ON
WOMEN'S ISSUES

REF: A. STATE 173333
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 4075
[1](#)C. KUWAIT 3984

Classified By: DCM Matt Tueller for reasons 1.4 (c) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary and comment: The women's issues legislation recently drafted by Islamist parliamentarians aims to increase state benefits provided to Kuwaiti women, not change their social and political status. It is likely the result of women's suffrage and recent electoral reforms resulting in larger constituencies, which are forcing MPs to build a broader base of support, and does not represent any significant change in Islamists' position on women's rights issues. Islamist MP Ahmed Bager said the proposal included some Islamist initiatives intended to protect women, such as prohibiting them from working in men's barbershops and other potentially morally degrading professions. A number of Islamist MPs have established committees/times to receive their female constituents' requests. Islamists have proven pragmatic within limits on women's issues as demonstrated during the June 2006 parliamentary elections. The Secretary General of the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM) told Poloff that the ICM's stance on women's issues had moderated to some extent due to the increased influence of moderates within the organization. He expressed hope that by the next elections or the following ones the ICM could even nominate women to run for Parliament.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) Comment: In order to appeal to a larger electorate, Islamists are likely to continue to try to get out in front on issues like fighting corruption, promoting economic development, defending Bidoon (stateless Arabs) rights, and obtaining more state benefits for women. The ICM, the largest and most well-organized political association in Kuwait, is most successful at this and their six MPs tend to be some of the most vocal advocates for these issues. While the ICM's current leadership tends to be more moderate on women's rights issues, the organization's conservative tribal base is more resistant to social changes. Other members of the Islamic Bloc are similarly influenced by their conservative, predominantly tribal constituencies on social issues. These social factors will likely continue to influence Islamist parliamentarians' positions on women's issues, even those who themselves hold more moderate opinions. End summary and comment.

Islamists Support More Benefits for Women

[1](#)3. (C/NF) The women's proposal recently drafted by Islamist parliamentarians (ref C) is primarily a political move intended to win the support of their new female constituents, and does not represent any significant change in their position on women's rights issues. It is important to note

that the proposal is concerned with increasing the benefits provided to Kuwaiti women, not their social and political status. While it was drafted by four Islamist MPs, the proposal is supported by the entire 17-member Islamic Bloc. Salafi MP Ahmed Baqer, a former Minister of Justice and the Coordinator of the Islamic Bloc, told Poloff that while the proposal's chief aim was to increase women's social benefits, it also included some Islamist initiatives, such as prohibiting women from working in men's barbershops and other potentially morally degrading professions. He explained that this was intended to protect women.

14. (SBU) In a recent interview, Baqer said the Islamic Bloc attaches great importance to women's issues and supports legislation banning "the manipulation of women"; easing retirement for mothers of handicapped children; providing employment for sons of Kuwaiti mothers; granting employment benefits to non-working housewives caring for their children; and giving housing and rental allowances to all Kuwaiti women. In late-October, independent Islamist MP Faisil Al-Muslim submitted two separate proposals to increase benefits provided to Kuwaiti women married to non-Kuwaiti men, specifically exempting their children from paying residence fees and providing them with free health care. (Note: Children born in Kuwait inherit the nationality of their father. End note.)

Islamists Pragmatic on Women's Issues, Within Limits

15. (SBU) Islamists have proven relatively pragmatic on women's issues, albeit within limits, and have been willing to alter their position when politically expedient. For example, during the June 2006 elections Islamist candidates,

KUWAIT 00004579 002 OF 002

some of whom voted against women's suffrage legislation in 2005, actively courted female voters, establishing women's campaign committees staffed by their female relatives and friends and hosting women at their election tents. MP Jaman Al-Hirbish, a member of the Women's Affairs Committee in Parliament and the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), the political arm of the Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood, announced recently that his female staff would answer questions and receive requests from female constituents at his diwaniya every Saturday evening. Another ICM MP, Dr. Nasser Al-Sane, also announced recently that he would "form a women's consultative committee to inform (him) of the demands of women in (his) constituency and take them to the Parliament." Other Islamist MPs have similarly established means of receiving requests for assistance from their female constituents.

ICM Moderates Influencing Position on Women's Issues?

16. (C/NF) Dr. Bader Al-Nashi, the Secretary General of the ICM, told Poloff December 5 that the ICM's more moderate wing was gaining influence vis-a-vis its more conservative elements, particularly after the ICM gained four seats in the 2006 parliamentary elections. Evidence of this can be seen in the organization's more moderate approach on women's issues, he argued. He added that the ICM would soon establish an internal Women's Committee, something that would not have been possible several years ago due to opposition from conservatives within the organization. Al-Nashi also expressed hope that the ICM would one day, "maybe in four or eight years," be able to nominate women to run for Parliament.

For more reporting from Embassy Kuwait, visit:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/?cable s>

Visit Kuwait's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/kuwait/>
